Mine Alternative 4. In Alternative 4, MMC would use the Libby Plant Site between Libby and Ramsey creeks, construct two additional adits in upper Libby Creek, and modify the proposed permit and disturbance areas at the LAD Areas, as in Alternative 3. MMC would modify the proposed Little Cherry Creek Tailings Impoundment Site operating permit and disturbance areas to avoid riparian areas and old growth in the Little Cherry Creek drainage. Borrow areas would be reconfigured to maximize disturbance within the impoundment footprint, and to minimize disturbance of riparian areas, core grizzly bear habitat, and old growth. At closure, surface water runoff from the impoundment surface would be directed toward the Little Cherry Creek Diversion Channel, and not Bear Creek, an important bull trout stream. The operating permit area would be 3,245 acres and the disturbance area would be 2,254 acres.

Transmission Line Alternatives

Transmission Line Alternative C. The primary modification in Alternative C to MMC's proposed North Miller Creek alignment (Alternative B) would be routing the line on an east-facing ridge immediately north of the Sedlak Park Substation instead of following the Fisher River. Other modifications to the alignment are relatively small shifts along Miller Creek and an unnamed tributary to Miller Creek. Wooden H-frame structures, which generally allow for longer spans and require fewer structures and access roads, would be used in Alternatives C, D and E. In some locations in Alternatives C, D and E, a helicopter would be used for vegetation clearing and structure construction.

Transmission Line Alternative D. As in Alternative C, this alternative modifies MMC's proposed North Miller Creek alignment by routing the line on an east-facing ridge immediately north of the Sedlak Park Substation. The alignment would following Miller Creek and then go north in the Howard Creek drainage to the Libby Plant Site. This alternative would use an alignment about 0.5 mile east of Howard Lake, a popular recreation facility in the project area.

Transmission Line Alternative E. The primary difference between Alternative E and Alternative B is routing the line on the north side of West Fisher Creek and not up the Miller Creek drainage to minimize effects on core grizzly bear habitat. Alternative E would use the same alignment north of the Sedlak Park Substation as Alternatives C and D, cross the Fisher River and West Fisher Creek south of the confluence of the river and the creek. It would be north of West Fisher Creek for about 6 miles. As in Alternative D, this alternative would use an alignment about 0.5 mile east of Howard Lake.

Additional Information

The Draft EIS and the Draft EIS Summary are available for download from the Kootenai National Forest website at:

www.fs.fed.us/r1/kootenai/projects/projects/montanore/index.shtml

or from the DEQ's website at:

http://www.deq.mt.gov/eis.asp

Open House and Public Meeting April 16, 2009

*The agencies will hold an open house and public hearing to solicit comments on the Draft EIS in Libby on **April 16, 2009**. The open house will start at 5:00 p.m. in the Ponderosa Room at Libby City Hall 952 East Spruct Street, Libby, MT. Resource specialists will be available to discuss the project and the Draft EIS analysis. The hearing will start at 6:30 p.m. with the solicitation of oral comment. All comments on the Draft EIS must be received by **May 28, 2009.***

Comments should be submitted to:

Bobbie Lacklen
Kootenai National Forest
Supervisor's Office
31374 U.S. Highway 2
Libby, Montana 59923
Phone (406) 283-7681
Email: r1_montanore@fs.fed.us

Bonnie Lovelace
Dept. of Environmental Quality
P.O. Box 200901
Helena, Montana 59620
Phone (406) 444-1760
Email: DEQMontanoreEIS@mt.gov

Montanore Project EIS

U P D A T E

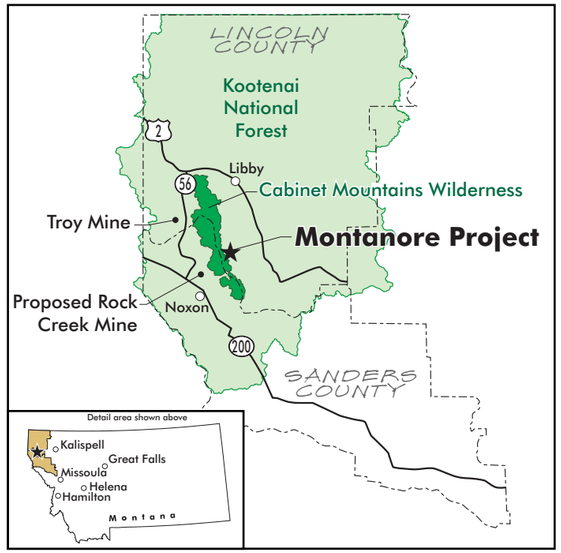
Montana Department of Environmental Quality

February 2009

Public Comment Requested

The Kootenai National Forest and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on February 27, 2009 disclosing the environmental impacts of the Montanore Project, a proposed silver/copper mine and associated electric transmission line. The agencies will hold an open house and public hearing to solicit comments on the Draft EIS in Libby on April 16, 2009 in the Ponderosa Room at City Hall in Libby, MT. All comments on the Draft EIS must be received by May 28, 2009.

After the comment period closes on May 28, 2009, the agencies will carefully consider each submitted comment. Comments will be used in preparing a Final EIS for the proposed project. Based on the nature of the comments, alternatives may be revised, or the effects analysis may be adjusted. Responses to substantive comments will be included in the Final EIS. The agencies will make the necessary decisions on the proposed project after the Final EIS is issued. Each agency's decision will be documented in a Record of Decision or similar decision-making document.



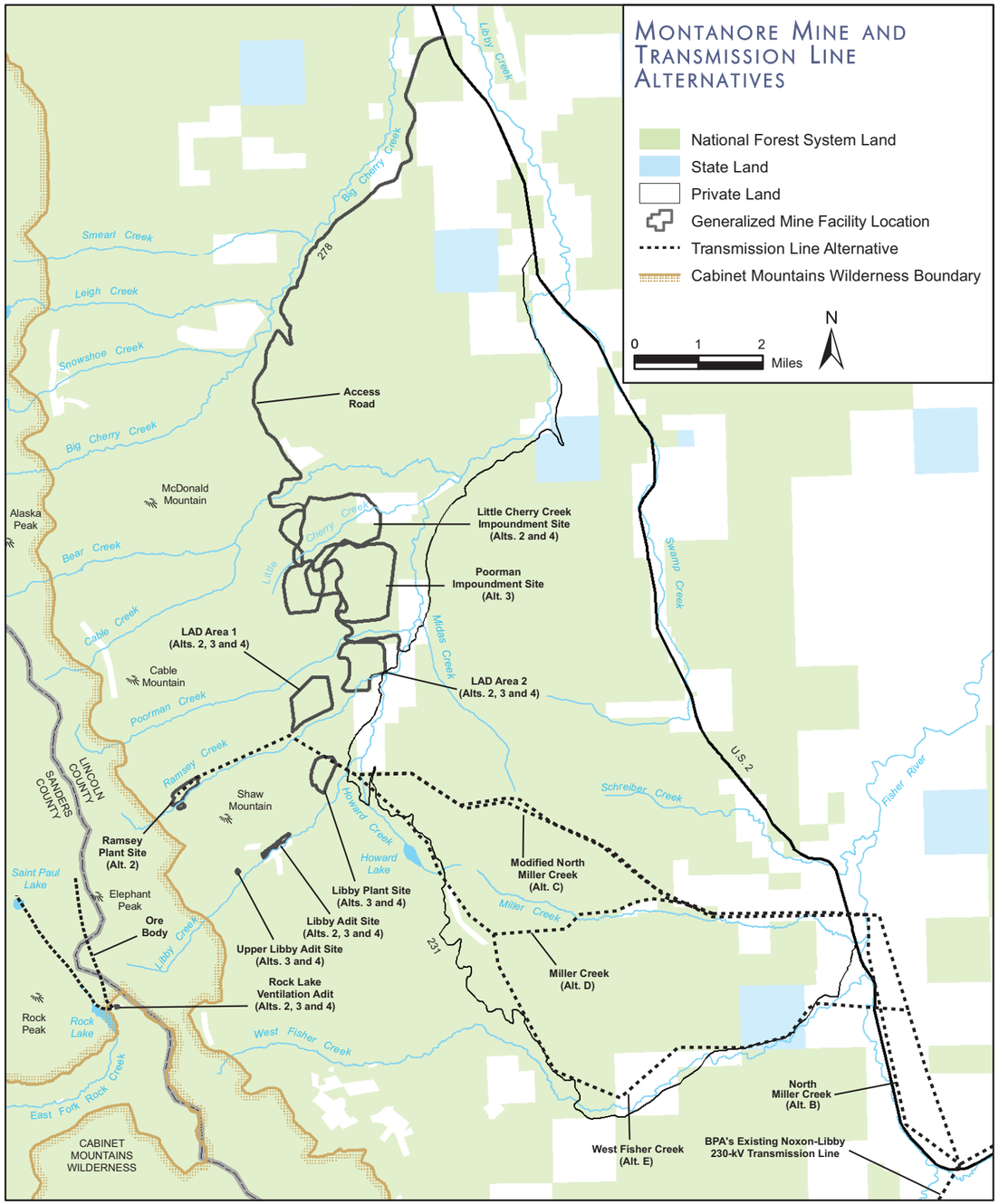
The underground mine would be in Sanders County. The mill and other facilities would be in Lincoln County, 18 miles south of Libby, Montana.

Proposed Project

In 2005, Mines Management, Inc. (MMI), an Idaho corporation, submitted a Plan of Operations and an application for an Operating Permit for the proposed Montanore Project to the Kootenai National Forest (KNF) and Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). MMI also submitted an application for a 230-kV transmission line, and air and water quality permits. The Montanore Project is a proposed underground copper and silver mine in northwestern Montana. The underground mine would be in Sanders County, and the mill and other facilities would be in Lincoln County, about 18 miles south of Libby, Montana (see regional map).The ore body is beneath the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness. All access and surface facilities would be located outside of the wilderness. Montanore Minerals Corp. (MMC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mines Management, Inc., would be the project operator.

The Montanore Project was originally permitted by Noranda Minerals Corporation (Noranda) in the early 1990s. Many of Noranda's permits for the Montanore Project terminated or expired. Noranda relinquished the Forest Service's authorization to construct and operate the mine in 1992. Noranda's DEQ Operating Permit #00150 and MPDES permit were not terminated because reclamation of the Libby Adit was not completed. In 2006, Newhi, Inc., a subsidiary of MMI, acquired Noranda. MMC (formerly Noranda) remains the holder of DEQ Operating Permit #00150 and the existing MPDES permit for the Montanore Project.

The KNF and the DEQ are joint lead agencies on an EIS for MMC's proposal. Cooperating agencies are the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), Army Corps of Engineers, and Lincoln County, Montana. A single Draft EIS for the Montanore Project is being prepared to provide a coordinated and comprehensive analysis of potential environmental impacts. Before construction and oper-



ation of the proposed project could begin, various other permits, licenses, or approvals from the two lead agencies and other agencies would be required.

With minor exceptions, MMC proposes to construct, operate, and reclaim a new mine and transmission line in accordance with the terms and conditions of the DEQ's Operating Permit #00150 and other agencies' permits and approvals issued to Noranda in 1992 and 1993. MMC and MMI have requested that the DEQ consider MMI's application for a hard rock operating permit as an application by MMC to modify DEQ Operating Permit #00150. The KNF considers MMC's 2005 Plan of Operations a new mining proposal on National Forest System lands.

As proposed by MMC, the mill and mine production adits would be located in the upper Ramsey Creek drainage, about 0.5 mile east of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness boundary. An additional adit would be located on private land in the Libby Creek drainage, and a raise or vertical opening would be built for ventilation on MMC's two patented mining claims adjacent to Rock Lake. A tailings impoundment is proposed in the Little Cherry Creek drainage, and would require the diversion of Little Cherry Creek. Two land application disposal (LAD) areas are proposed to allow for discharge of water. Waste rock would be stored temporarily at one LAD area. MMC would upgrade National Forest System road #278 (Bear Creek Road), NFS road #4781 (Ramsey Creek Road), and NFS road #2316 (Upper Libby Creek Road). The operating permit area would be 3,628 acres and the disturbance area would be 2,582 acres.

A new, 230-kilovolt (kV) electric transmission line would provide power to the mill and other mine facilities. A new substation also would be needed. BPA's proposed substation site at the Noxon-Libby 230-kV transmission line is in an area known locally as Sedlak Park, about 30 miles southeast of Libby on U.S. 2. The BPA would design, construct, own, operate, and maintain the Sedlak Park Substation and loop line. The BPA is prohibited by law from providing power directly to a user. Flathead Electrical Cooperative would be the retailer of power to the mine project. MMC would be responsible for funding construction of the powerline, substation, and loop line that would connect the substation to BPA's Noxon-Libby 230-kV transmission line.

MMC's proposed transmission line alignment would head northwest from the substation for about 1 mile paralleling U.S. 2, and then follow the Fisher River and U.S. 2 north about 3.3 miles. The alignment would then turn west and generally follow the Miller Creek drainage for 2.5 miles, and then turn northwest and traverse up a tributary to Miller Creek. The alignment would then cross into the upper Midas Creek drainage, and then down to Howard and Libby Creek drainages. The alignment would cross the low ridge between Libby Creek and Ramsey Creek, and then would generally follow Ramsey Creek to the Ramsey Plant Site. All structures would be steel monopoles. Helicopter use for vegetation clearing and structure placement would be at MMC's discretion.

Mine Alternatives

The agencies developed alternatives to MMC's proposal based on various regulatory requirements. Besides the No Action and a Proposed Action alternatives for both the mine facilities and transmission line, the lead agencies analyzed in detail two mine alternatives and three transmission line alternatives. Mine alternatives are numbered (Alternatives 1 through 4) and transmission line alternatives have letters (Alternatives A through E). Alternatives 1 and A are the No Action alternatives. Alternative 2 is MMC's proposed mine alternative and Alternative B is MMC's proposed transmission line alternative.

No Action. In the No Action alternatives, MMC would not develop the Montanore Project, although it is approved under DEQ Operating Permit #00150. The Montanore Project, as proposed, cannot be implemented without a corresponding Forest Service approval of a Plan of Operations. The DEQ's approval of the mine, as permitted by DEQ Operating Permit #00150 and revised in Minor Revisions 06-001 and 06-002, would remain in effect. MMC could continue with the permitted activities on private land associated with the Libby Adit evaluation program that do not affect National Forest System lands. MMC also would not build a 230-kV transmission line to provide power. The BPA would not tap the Noxon-Libby 230-kV transmission line nor would it build the Sedlak Park Substation.

Mine Alternative 3. Mine Alternative 3 would incorporate modifications and mitigating measures proposed by the lead agencies to reduce or eliminate adverse environmental impacts. These measures are in addition to or instead of the mitigations proposed by MMC. In Alternative 3, the four major mine facilities would be located in alternative locations. MMC would develop a Poorman Tailings Impoundment Site north of Poorman Creek for tailings disposal, use the Libby Plant Site between Libby and Ramsey creeks, construct two additional adits in upper Libby Creek, and modify the proposed operating permit and disturbance areas at LAD Areas 1 and 2 to avoid important resources. The operating permit area would be 2,606 acres and the disturbance area would be 2,011 acres. Mine alternatives 3 and 4 include additional mitigation and monitoring not proposed by MMC.